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Former Deputy Walters Defends CIA

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Despite "all the loose talk" of criminal activity by the Central Intelligence Agency, not enough evidence has been found "to convince any grand jury in the United States to indict any CIA member," railed retiring CIA Deputy Director Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters.

"The impression is that the Great CIA Ear is listening to everybody and the Great Eye is reading everybody's mail," grumbled Walters Tuesday before about 80 members and guests of the Palm Beach Kiwanis Club at the Breakers Hotel.

But the fact remains that while CIA has been charged with conducting 32 illegal wiretaps in its 27-year history, the wiretaps were used only against other CIA agents suspected of taking documents home or other wrong-doing, he said.

"And the only mail opened was mail going to or coming from the Soviet Union, the Communist bloc, or China," Walters explained. "Every one of those letters was either opened already by the other side or was going to be when it got there. And nearly all this activity you read about occurred in the late 50s or early 60s when we had a much greater sense of urgency about the (Communist) threat."

Walters, 59, who will be making his home in Palm Beach later this month, was nominated by President Richard Nixon to the number two CIA post and confirmed by the Senate in 1972.

He was replaced Wednesday as deputy director by E. Henry Knoche, the agency's associate deputy director.

Despite critics' claims that today's covert intelligence operations would shock our founding fathers, Walters rattled off a Who's Who list of prominent Americans who themselves participated in what could be dubbed "immoral, unAmerican" activities.

"George Washington was probably the greatest reader of other people's mail in American history," Walters said.

Washington also staged three separate kidnapping attempts against branded traitor Benedict Arnold, and "I think we all know what he intended to do with Benedict Arnold when he got hold of him."

Benjamin Franklin, who was assistant postmaster of British North America three years prior to the American Revolution, "just opened that British mail like crazy," Wal-



Retiring CIA Deputy Director Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters spoke this week before members of the Palm Beach Kiwanis Club at the Breakers Hotel.

Photo by MORT KAYE

Instead of labeling CIA agents as "kooks" and "fascists" and wallowing in the agency's transgressions, the American people have to face up to the real issue, he said.

"The real issue is do the American people want to have an effective intelligence service so we will not have to stumble blindly along until the day when we have to face the alternative between abject humiliation or nuclear blackmail," Walters thundered. "If the CIA fails, who will watch out for freedom?"

In a question and answer session, Walters said he believes there is an organized campaign to discredit the CIA, but he dismissed theories that a hostile American media are being "inspired" and "paid-off" by foreign powers.

"The American media are not comprised of foreign agents. That is a preposterous idea," he said. "But there is an attempt by our enemies to use everything they can that is derogatory to us. There is nothing as effective against the United States

and the agency as a derogatory quote from an American."

Upon questioning, Walters explained in his closing remarks how the Nixon White House had attempted to involve him and the CIA in the Watergate cover-up.

According to Walters, then White House counsel John Dean had called Walters to ask if he would pay the bail of the arrested Watergate burglars and their salaries out of secret CIA funds.

"I said I would not," relates Walters. "He called me again, and I said, 'If you ask me again, I will resign and will go to the President and tell him why I am resigning.'"

In his testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee, Dean related that after Walters refused his request, Dean went to then White House aide John Ehrlichman and said, "Walters won't play ball." Ehrlichman replied, "He forgets there is an attempt by our enemies to use everything they can that is derogatory to us. There is nothing as effective against the United States

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At that point, every major newspaper in the United States stopped the verbatim quote of Dean's testimony, Walters complained. But the Congressional Record shows that John Dean's next statement was, "I was ashamed to go back to General Walters the second time since he had been so explicit (in his refusal) the first time."

"By an extraordinary coincidence," snapped Walters, "every newspaper reporting the testimony stopped at, 'Go back and lean on him.' I found that an unusual coincidence."